

Rats of Bergen .

George G. Hollingshead



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By

George G. Hollingshead

To George McCornell
from

George Hollingshead

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RATS OF BERGEN

The rats in Bergen grew so bold
They interrupted grace.
Their like had not been known of old.
They gnawed the chimney place.

They ate the corners off the doors,
And squeaked and raced at night;
And scampered up and down the floors
So none could sleep for fright.

They ate up all the good mince pie
Upon the pantry shelves;
And while the wives would rave and cry,
They just would gorge themselves.

Their nests were made of ladies' hats;
The little chicks were killed;
You never yet have seen such rats;
They did just as they willed.

So grievously was Bergen scourged
And huge the loss sustained,
That any means one ever urged
Was tried. Cats were maintained.

Despite it all the rats grew worse.
The folks took new alarm.
They knew that on the town a curse
Was causing all the harm.

A week of fast and prayer was made
To rid them of the pest.
The saint went daily on parade.
Rat-catchers all were blessed.

So filled were they with eagerness
To find and kill the rats,
They organized with thoroughness,
Bought guns and traps and cats,

Which were brought in from far and near,
And poison too, by tons;
And all the traps assembled there
Were set in holes and runs.

A half a million rats they took
The first month of their quest,
And it began to them to look
Like they had cured the pest.

Then doubling up their energy
To wage a fiercer war
And quickly end their misery,
They caught as many more.

Each month the catch was just as great,
As was the damage done.
The funds were spent without rebate.
The nuisance still went on.

At last the council, in despair,
Met hastily, on call,
To scrutinize the whole affair
And question one and all.

Why had their plans so come to naught?
Why did not rats decrease?
Why millions they had trapped and caught
Had brought them no release?

Then up spoke one and he explained
The biologic laws,
By which the rats themselves maintained
Despite their frightful loss.

“When you began the warfare here
You found in nests but twins;
But in the nests you found this year
The baby rats were tens.

Relentless warfare on she-rats
Will save this wretched town.
When caught, set free the bold he-rats
And soon the pest will down.

To win your reputation back,
And since all else has failed,
I offer you this new attack."
This was both booed and hailed.

With doubled zeal and gleeful shout
The battle raged anew.
The useless cats were soon thrown out.
They only kept a few.

Determined to exterminate
The vermin with dispatch,
They set the traps with extra bait
And made a mighty catch.

Asphyxiating all females,
A half of those they got;
They liberated all the males,
While many shouted, "Rot."

No longer lady rats need slick
The fur to catch their beaux,
For ardent suitors soon were thick.
They stood about in rows.

To be so popular was thought
At first to be a boon,
But so persistent grew the lot
That all were wearied soon.

Most bitter grew the rivalry,
By jealousy inspired.
The he-rats fought for mastery
With rage that never tired.

As widowers increased by scores
And sought anew for wives,
The struggle with the bachelors
Cost noble rats their lives.

All plump and fat the rats had been,
And slick and smooth their fur,
But now they grew both fierce and thin,
And nothing like they were.

Their eyes were red, their faces bled,
Their skin was torn and scratched;
They never slept, they watched instead;
And always they were matched

Against the foes they hated so,
They wished that they were dead;
And thus they laid each other low;
And thus they fought and bled.

The nests were wrecked and scattered,
And none were built at all.
The jealous madness shattered
The homes of great and small.

More fiercely fought the mad he-rats
As time increased their plight,
Until in fear the poor she-rats
Sought safety in swift flight.

As from a place accurst they fled,
In panic and in haste.
Their suitors followed where they led,
And far indeed they raced.

Of all the hordes that plagued the town
A crippled few remained;
And these the hunters soon ran down,
And all were caught and brained.

In Bergen now no rats are found
To scare the frugal wives;
And all the night to scamper round
And gnaw with teeth like knives.

No raids are made on little chicks;
No damage to the cheese;
No pies are spoiled, nor other tricks,
That once did so displease.

The folks of Bergen live in peace,
They solved their little puzzle.
From plague of rats they found release,
And now can sit and guzzle.



J.E.S.

